

First Nations Education Steering Committee

First Nations Schools Association

Special Needs Education Funding Implementation

Five Year Plan

The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and the First Nations Schools Association (FNSEA) have been mandated by BC First Nations Schools to administer the special needs education program funding for the BC Region. To ensure that there is an effective and efficient implementation process FNESC and the FNSEA has established a unit to administer the special education dollars specifically.

The recent federal budget announcement on December 10, 2001, included 185 million dollars over two years for aboriginal children. The areas included in this allotment are Head Start programs, FAS/E initiatives, and special education funding for aboriginal children on reserve. The overlap of these three areas necessitates an integration of services if a holistic, child-centred approach to service delivery is to be possible. For this reason, this budget has taken into account a combination of FAS/E dollars and special education dollars in certain areas. A proposal is currently being developed in order to address the need for joint initiatives between Health and Education.

The research report, *Over-representation of Aboriginal Students Reported with Behaviour Disorders, 2001*, commissioned by the aboriginal Education Branch and the Special Programs Branch of the Ministry of Education, further supports the need for community and inter-agency involvement. The Ministry of Children and Families, for example, were involved in over 50% of the cases of aboriginal students identified as behaviour disordered. In 72.5% of the cases, at least one other agency was involved.

It is anticipated that the unit and the implementation process will evolve over time, as BC First Nations schools, the unit and BC special needs professionals build capacity in the area of special education program delivery in BC First Nations schools. This increased capacity will affect the emphasis that is placed on each area of the proposed budget.

The following is a narrative description of the budget areas, and there is a budget summary at the end of this document that captures the total budget required. Although funding has been secured for two years, the outlined budget has included five years in anticipation of ongoing funding. Years one and two represent funding that has been secured, and years three through five represent the funding that will be sought. This unsecured funding is represented by grey shading.

Professional Development

There is currently a shortage of appropriately trained professionals in the field of special education, both in First Nations schools and in provincial schools. As First Nations schools receive funding to implement special education programs there will need to be a significant amount of energy devoted to professional development and incentives for new and experienced teachers to undertake further training in the area of special education programming. FNESC is currently approaching community colleges to explore the possibility of creating a diploma in special education for teachers and teacher assistants in First Nations communities. Courses relevant to the special education issues in First Nations communities would be offered throughout the province, and credit would be given towards the diploma. The selection of topics will be based on feedback from teachers, data from the special education resource line, and the findings of the research conducted by Dr. Art More. Examples of some possible courses are as follows: FAS/E strategies, auditory processing disorders, effective behaviour strategies, oral language development, IEP development and implementation, effective reading instruction.

To ensure that special education programs offered in First Nations schools are culturally relevant and sensitive there

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will also need to be professional development in the adaptation of pedagogies and approaches to service delivery. This may include training community members and parents who may wish to be part of the special education programs in the school or who wish to support students at home in a manner that is consistent with the school programming. To further support the development of culturally sensitive tools and programs the FNEsc/FNSA unit will undertake research to adapt or develop new, First Nations appropriate approaches to special education programs.

Another need that has been identified in the area of professional development is speech and language services. FNEsc/FNSA is currently looking into Speech and Language Assistant Diploma programs. Courses will be offered regionally or by distance education and overseen by a FNEsc itinerant Speech and Language Pathologist. Participants in this program will do their required practical experience in First Nations communities/schools, thereby delivering much needed services to students.

It is anticipated that the need for professional development will increase as First Nations schools and communities become more engaged in the delivery of special education programming. It is anticipated that the delivery of professional development services will be a shared responsibility between the FNEsc/FNSA Unit and First Nations schools. As capacity increases in communities the level of professional development activities that are delivered locally will increase and the need for provincial coordination will decrease.

FNEsc/FNSA will continue to provide professional development opportunities through the Special Education Conference. The purpose of this conference will continue to be the provision of the results of current research which is then linked to training opportunities in effective strategies and programs. The establishment of 'best practices' in the area of special education for First Nations will stem from the results of longitudinal studies.

The following budget represents the anticipated funding requirements for the next five years.

Activity	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Special Education Conference - Prov.	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000
Teacher Incentives for special needs upgrading (tuition and living allowance, summer programs, extension programs, etc.) - Prov.	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000
Research - prov.	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000
Community grants for professional development days for schools and communities - FN schools	\$360,000	\$360,000	\$480,000	\$480,000	600,000
Total	\$735,000	\$735,000	\$735,000	\$735,000	\$735,000

Student Assessment

Over the last two years FNEC and the FNSA have worked collaboratively to undertake two phases of a student assessment project. In total over 330 students have been assessed and Individual Education Plans have been developed for each student. The results of these assessments have been compiled and support the claims by First Nations schools that there is a significant population of students who have special needs in First Nations schools. This research, while limited, provides an excellent starting point for continued work in this area.

To continue this work it is anticipated that the FNEC/FNSA unit will continue to coordinate student assessments throughout the BC Region and will continue to provide summative reports to First Nations schools and the Department of Indian Affairs as part of the exercise of supporting the argument for special needs education dollars in First Nations schools. This coordination will also serve to create economies of scale by centrally hiring qualified psychologists to undertake the assessments in the schools on a much larger scale than has been done previously. Some assessments will also be conducted by the FNEC/FNSA special education team who are already travelling to communities.

While many schools may participate in the centrally coordinated assessment activities, schools will also require some separate assessments for students with extreme exceptionalities and for classroom based assessments. In the report on the Provincial Special Needs Policy, the authors emphasized the importance and effectiveness of classroom assessments. They capture many learning challenges and serve as effective tools for preparing classroom and student learning approaches. The special education team is currently researching effective, reliable and affordable assessment tools for teacher use.

There is also the need for standardized, school wide assessments for the purpose of a longitudinal study. In order to establish effective practices in First Nations communities, a common assessment tool needs to be used among communities. The results of these assessments will be used as one type of performance indicator and will be included in the summative reports to First Nations schools and the Department of Indian Affairs. The Canadian Test of Basic Skills and the Canadian Achievement Test are currently being considered, and the publishers of these tests are being approached in order to establish bulk purchasing prices and create economies of scale.

In addition to the actual assessments, the schools will need to develop Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for each student according to their needs, and they will need to plan on a school-by-school basis for appropriate interventions. To support these activities there will need to be direct allocations to schools through a base-plus-per capita formula to cover the costs of the resources necessary to accomplish these tasks.

As the development and implementation of IEPs will be very time consuming and challenging for classroom teachers, it will be important to provide support for assistance and evaluation of the IEP implementation. To facilitate this, two specialists will be hired to work with classroom teachers in a support fashion. These specialists will perform the same role that itinerant special education assistants in the provincial districts currently provide. They will also travel extensively to enable them to support classroom teachers on site so a substantial travel budget has been included. A Speech and Language Pathologist is currently being sought as one of the specialists to be hired in order to oversee speech and language programs in communities. Currently, the special education team is providing support by school visits and inservices/information provided upon request.

Due to the high costs associated with FAS/E assessments, it is anticipated that FNEC/FNSA will develop a cost sharing approach with the provincial FAS funding in order to make these assessments more accessible to First Nations people, and to allow special education dollars to be used for other types of special education assessments such as psychoeducational assessments.

Activity	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Student Assessments - provincially coordinated	\$190,000	\$190,000	\$190,000	\$190,000	\$190,000
Two coordinators plus travel - provincially coordinated.	\$210,000	\$210,000	\$210,000	\$210,000	\$210,000
Student Assessments, IEP development, plans for interventions by school.	\$600,000	\$600,000	\$600,000	\$600,000	\$600,000
Total	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000

Early Intervention

In all of the research undertaken by FNEC and the FNSA, both through literature reviews and through direct contact with schools and special education professionals, it has been emphasized that early intervention is the most effective way to assist special needs students.

In the research compiled by Dr. Art More for the FNEC/FNSA in 1999, he noted that one of the major challenges for First Nations learners is in the area of speech and language acquisition and that this would contribute to delayed reading and numeracy skills in school. One area of prevention that could prevent students from developing grade level deficits would be early intervention in the area of speech and language. A second area that has been highlighted is the need to have early literacy programs to assist learners in acquiring the necessary pre-reading and early literacy skills that will give them the foundation to be successful in all areas of schooling. Both of these types of programs may not be immediately identified as special education prevention programs but they help students before they develop grade level deficits and will enable them to proceed through the school system with less need for further intervention. If their needs are left unaddressed until after grade four or higher, these students may have already dropped grade levels, have poor self-esteem due to limited school success, and may require much more intervention and may or may not choose to ultimately continue with their schooling.

In reviewing the Gathering Strength initiatives that First Nations schools have undertaken in the area of special needs many have focussed on this type of early intervention already and would like to expand these programs. Early literacy/phonemic awareness assessment tools are currently being researched in order to serve as performance indicators in this area.

There has also been significant discussion regarding the need for improved coordination and approaches between existing early childhood education programs such as the Head Start initiative funded by Health Canada, the Aboriginal Child Care Initiative funded by Human Resource Development Canada, and the Kindergarten 4 program funded by the Department of Indian Affairs. There will need to be work undertaken in this area to support improved coordination at both the regional and local level. This will require additional funding to support workshops and brainstorming sessions, both government and community representatives would need to be involved in these discussions.

Coordination of community prevention programs is another cost effective way of integrating services. Community events such as FAS/E prevention programs can be joint initiatives between Health and Education, drawing on targeted FAS dollars.

Activity	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Community Prevention Programs	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
Improved coordination activities	0	0	To be determined	To be determined	To be determined
Total	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000

First Nations Schools Special Education Programs

In 1999 FNEC and the FNSA developed the proposal *None Left Behind* which built on the data collected through the student assessment research conducted in BC First Nations schools, with a comparison of services available in BC provincial schools. This proposal provided a conservative estimate for the special needs funding required in First Nations schools. Minimal projected increases in the rates for special needs education programming with the province have been considered in the figures quoted below. For a more complete understanding of the funding requirements or how the figures were calculated please refer to the *None Left Behind* proposal.

It is presumed that the nature and extent of the needs identified for the students will continue at similar rates. Changes may occur in the budget as data is collected in years one and two and modifications may be required, however these figures are the most relevant and sound available for BC First Nations schools.

The one area that is notably absent is in the area of physically dependent or handicapped. That was found to be zero as most First Nations schools have to turn away such students as they have not historically been able to meet their needs due to lack of resources. This has been considered as part of this budget. Consideration has to be given to the need to ensure that buildings are accessible and suitable for students with physical handicaps, and this may mean minor or major renovations. The school programs may also have to be modified to adapt to specialized equipment or other challenges that also may require funding.

The establishment of best practices in terms of instruction and programming would benefit special needs students as well as the school population as a whole. For example, students with behavioural difficulties are typically disruptive to an entire class. A structured, systematic instructional approach/program benefits all those involved by eliminating or reducing school disruptions and providing a sound, research-based approach.

The research conducted by FNEC/FNSA prior to this year's Special Education Conference focussed on research-based literacy and behaviour strategies and programs in order to address these issues as identified in the findings of the Special Needs Assessment Project and the Schools Assessment study. Bulk purchasing arrangements are currently being made with the publishers of two of the reading programs in order to significantly reduce the costs to schools.

Activity	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
First Nations schools Special Education Programming	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000
Equipment purchase or renovations	To be determined	To be determined	To be determined	To be determined	To be determined
Total	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000

Coordination

To provide appropriate coordination and support for the implementation of the special needs education funding FNESC and the FNSA will set up a unit comprised of appropriately trained professionals to provide direct support to communities. The permanent employees of the unit will include a Special Education Manager, a Special Education Resource Teacher and one support staff. These persons would be responsible for the coordination of the entire special needs program, including the hiring of psychologists and other professionals to conduct assessments and provide IEP support, administering the speaker's series, the teacher incentives program, the community grants and arranging for the evaluations. Every effort will be made to hire professionals for assessment and IEP support who are located close to groupings of schools to maximize savings in the areas of travel and accommodations.

There will also be a continuation of the toll free support line that is in its third year of operation. This line provides community members, teachers, parents and even students, with easy and immediate access to a wealth of information regarding any special needs questions. The toll free line also serves as a research tool as careful records are kept regarding the types of questions that are asked to gain a better understanding of the types of information that are most commonly requested. According to this data, the most frequently occurring questions are those that deal with FAS/E. Due to this fact, it is anticipated that FNESC/FNSA will draw on the provincial funding allocated for FAS to be able to continue to provide this service. Support to parents and educators of First Nations children in the provincial system is also being provided. These numbers are increasing as knowledge of this resource grows. To respond to these common issues more information pamphlets that are tailored to parents and teachers will be prepared and distributed to communities. These pamphlets are a continuation of the series prepared by FNESC from 1999-2000. Currently, there are six pamphlets addressing Special Education generally, FAS/E, ADHD, a Handbook for Parents, a Teacher's Guide to IEPs, and a Parent's Guide to IEPs. It is anticipated that as First Nations schools are able to implement special needs programming further pamphlets or information pieces will be useful.

FNESC and the FNSA will provide management support and this unit will fall under the personnel structure of FNESC and be responsible to the FNESC Executive Director and FNESC Personnel Committee. In addition to the support provided by FNESC and the FNSA, a separate management committee will be established to monitor the unit. This committee will be comprised of First Nations schools representatives and special education professionals who can provide direction, trouble shoot and participate in the evaluation of the process. This committee will meet on a regular basis and report to FNESC and the FNSA quarterly.

There will be an evaluative component of this five year plan that would see a different portion of the process evaluated each year. This is to enable FNESC and the FNSA to ensure that the best possible services are being provided to support First Nations students and schools. Changes will be incorporated according to recommendations and these will be ratified by the membership of the FNSA each year at the FNSA Annual General Meeting.

Activity	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Salaries - Manager - Resource Teacher - Secretary	\$181,500	\$181,500	\$181,500	\$181,500	\$181,500
Office Lease	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000
Phone, Fax, postage, etc.	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000
Travel	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
Toll free support line	Gathering Strength and FAS funding	Gathering Strength and FAS funding	Gathering Strength and FAS funding	Gathering Strength and FAS funding	Gathering Strength and FAS funding
Handbook preparation	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
Evaluation	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000
Management Committee	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000
FNESC Management Fee *	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000
Total	\$371,500	\$371,500	\$371,500	\$371,500	\$371,500

* This includes time of the Executive Director, finance and audit services and personnel committee time including meeting costs.

Summary Five Year Budget

Activity	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Professional Development	\$735,000	\$735,000	\$735,000	\$735,000	\$735,000
Student Assessment	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Early Childhood Education Activities	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
First Nations Schools Special Education Programs	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000
Equipment purchase or renovations	To be determined	To be determined	To be determined	To be determined	To be determined
Coordination	\$371,500	\$371,500	\$371,500	\$371,500	\$371,500
Total	\$5,606,500	\$5,606,500	\$5,606,500	\$5,606,500	\$5,606,500